

CHAPTER 274

AN ACT establishing a New Jersey Elderly Person Suicide Prevention Advisory Council and supplementing Title 26 of the Revised Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

C.26:2MM-1 Findings, declarations relative to elderly person suicide prevention.

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:
 - a. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, elderly Americans are disproportionately likely to die by suicide; individuals 65 years of age and older comprise only 13% of the United States population, but they accounted for 18% of all suicide deaths in 2000;
 - b. In New Jersey, individuals 65 years of age and older also comprise about 13% of the State population and they accounted for 17% of all suicide deaths in the State in 2000;
 - c. The national suicide rate for men is relatively constant from 25 to 64 years of age, but increases significantly after 65 years of age, with men accounting for 84% of suicides among individuals 65 years of age and older in 2000; and for women the national suicide rate peaks between 45 and 64 years of age and does so again after 75 years of age;
 - d. When categorized by race and gender, white men 85 years of age and older have among the highest suicide rates nationally, with 59 deaths per 100,000 persons in 2000, which is more than five times the national rate of 10.6 per 100,000, and according to "Healthy New Jersey 2010," issued by the Department of Health and Senior Services, the seventh leading cause of premature death among New Jerseyans is suicide, with the highest rates among elderly white males;
 - e. The risk factors for suicide among elderly Americans differ from those among younger groups; elderly persons have a higher prevalence of depression, greater use of highly lethal methods and greater social isolation;
 - f. The presence of mental illness (especially depression and alcohol abuse), the presence of physical illness or impairment, unrelieved pain, financial stress and social isolation (especially being widowed in males) and the availability of firearms in the home contribute to the higher incidence of suicide among elderly Americans;
 - g. Suicide among elderly Americans may even be underreported by 40% or more; omitted from statistics are "silent suicides," such as deaths from noncompliance with medical instructions, prescription overdosages, self-starvation or dehydration and other self-induced "accidents";
 - h. Most elderly patients who complete suicide saw their physicians within a few months of their deaths and more than a third did so within the week of their suicide, and warning signs which indicate a serious risk of suicide include: loss of interest in things or activities that are usually seen as enjoyable; lessening of social interactions, self-care and grooming; violating medical regimens or prescription dosages; experiencing or expecting loss of a spouse; feeling hopeless or worthless; and putting personal affairs in order, including giving things away or making changes to a will; and
 - i. Physicians, nurses and other health care professionals who treat and care for elderly patients need to be aware of the higher incidence of suicide among elderly Americans and recognize the risk factors associated with this age group.

C.26:2MM-2 Definitions relative to elderly person suicide prevention.

2. As used in this act:
 - "Alcohol and drug counselor" means a person who is a certified alcohol and drug counselor or a licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor pursuant to P.L.1997, c.331 (C.45:2D-1 et seq.).
 - "Attempted suicide" means destructive behavior intended by the actor to result in the actor's harm or death.
 - "Completed suicide" means a death that is known or reasonably suspected to have resulted from an intentional act of the deceased, regardless of whether it has been ruled a suicide by a medical examiner.
 - "Council" means the New Jersey Elderly Person Suicide Prevention Advisory Council established pursuant to section 3 of this act.
 - "Department" means the Department of Health and Senior Services.

"Elderly person" means a person 65 years of age and older.

"Licensed clinical social worker" means a person who holds a current, valid license issued pursuant to subsection a. of section 6 or subsection a. or d. of section 8 of P.L.1991, c.134 (C.45:15BB-1 et seq.).

C.26:2MM-3 New Jersey Elderly Person Suicide Prevention Advisory Council.

3. There is established in the Department of Health and Senior Services the New Jersey Elderly Person Suicide Prevention Advisory Council.

a. The purpose of the council shall be to examine existing needs of and services for elderly persons at risk of suicide and make recommendations to the department for suicide prevention and intervention strategies to help reduce the incidence of attempted and completed suicides among elderly persons.

b. The council shall consist of nine members as follows:

(1) the Commissioners of Health and Senior Services and Human Services and the chairman of the Community Mental Health Citizens Advisory Board established pursuant to P.L.1957, c.146 (C.30:9A-1 et seq.), or their designees, who shall serve ex officio;

(2) two public members appointed by the Governor, one of whom shall be a person with personal or family experience with suicide of an elderly person and one of whom shall be an alcohol and drug counselor;

(3) two public members appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, who are not members of the same political party, one of whom shall be a registered professional nurse and one of whom shall be a licensed clinical social worker; and

(4) two public members appointed by the President of the Senate, who are not members of the same political party, one of whom shall be a physician who has been specially trained in caring for elderly persons and has a certificate of added qualifications in geriatrics and one of whom shall be a geropsychiatrist.

c. The public members shall be appointed no later than 60 days after the enactment of this act.

d. The public members shall serve for a term of five years; but, of the members first appointed, two shall serve for a term of three years, two shall serve for a term of four years and two shall serve for a term of five years. Members are eligible for reappointment upon the expiration of their terms. Vacancies in the membership of the council shall be filled in the same manner provided for the original appointments.

e. The council shall organize as soon as practicable following the appointment of its members and shall select a chairperson and vice-chairperson from among the members. The chairperson shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the council.

f. The public members shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and within the limits of funds available to the council.

g. The council shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county or municipal department, board, bureau, commission or agency as it may require and as may be available to it for its purposes.

h. The Department of Health and Senior Services shall provide staff support to the council.

C.26:2MM-4 Annual report.

4. a. The council shall report annually to the department on the needs of and services for elderly persons at risk of suicide and make any recommendations for suicide prevention and intervention strategies to help reduce the incidence of attempted and completed suicides among elderly persons.

b. The department shall report, in a manner and form prescribed by the department, specific recommendations, as appropriate, to the Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Law and Public Safety who shall inform appropriate health care professionals, through the respective professional licensing boards, of the council's recommendations.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 6, 2006.